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THE MARKET FOR THE SCHOLARLY BOOK*

The publication and distribution of books possessing a scholarly rather than a mercantile value present problems that are particularly adapted as subjects of consideration by the Modern Language Association and upon the solution of which the academic investigator and the educational publisher may quite properly take counsel with each other. The entire question is also of more than timely importance not only for the advancement of pure scholarship but by reason of the fact that the unprecedented increase in our College and University enrollment and the interest manifested by students in the pursuit of Modern Languages have brought the teacher face to face with the opportunity of expanding his advanced and graduate classes and, consequently, with the need of supplying his courses with adequate and attractive tools of instruction. What is the actual state of affairs? Where does the scholar at present obtain serious books of this character? Where can he arrange for the publication of such books? What are the difficulties that confront the publishers? What remedies may be applied to conditions now prevailing? These questions can best be answered by means of a frank interchange of ideas.

If, by the term "scholarly book" we understand, for our present purposes, the product of disciplined investigation in languages and literatures, ranging from editions of recognized linguistic and literary monuments, and from comprehensive grammatical manuals of older dialects to the results of scholarly research in the science of General Linguistics, it must be stated at the outset that there exists no classified survey of such works as they are published annually by the American, English, German, and French book trades. Prior to the year 1911 the statistics of books issued in the United States lack all mention of the word "Philology." Begin-

* A paper read at the Philadelphia meeting of the Modern Language Association of America, December 28, 1922; see *Proceedings*, p. xx.

ning with and subsequent to this year, "Philology" stands merely for a convenient class in which to place pell-mell all the educational publications that have even the remotest connection with languages and literatures. Thus, out of the average number of titles published in this country during the past decade, namely 10,000, the average for "Philology," namely 250 titles, includes not only every single textbook in the field of Classical and Modern Languages, but such nondescript items as Soldiers' Manuals for the Study of French and proposals for new universal languages. Only an inconsiderable percentage of titles can be ascribed to "Philology" in our sense, and even this number must be reduced to a minimum if we search for the works of American authors alone, and deduct those of foreign authors which are importations from England or translations from Continental countries.

This, in a few words, represents the supply of available scholarly books,—perhaps not even 100 titles in Modern Languages,—to which an unquestionable American origin can be ascribed. As to their actual circulation, all figures are mere guesswork. There might be more circulation given to one old textbook in a year than to a hundred new and old scholarly titles selling in small editions. The government keeps no census of the scholarly books issued, nor even of the total book production, and publishers have good reasons for maintaining discreet silence. But, if one may judge from the curious fact that, for several years in succession, an almost identical number of works is published in such fields as Philosophy, Pedagogy, and even Philology, it is perhaps safe to assume that the idea of most scholars with respect to the outlet for scholarly books is an exaggerated one. Preface after Preface continues to state that a given work, intended primarily for academic use, is also adapted to the general reading public. But the general public, as is proven by statistics, hankers after works of Fiction, which often comprise 30% of the annual output of titles; it has of late become astonishingly interested in History, Religion, and

the Social Sciences; but as for the Classics of Ancient and Modern Languages, it shows a decided preference for reading them, if at all, in translation; and, in the field of General Linguistics, it is very doubtful if one-tenth of one per cent of the public ever reads the fascinating pages of a book like Bréal's *Semantics*, or of other even more popularly written books dealing with the historical development of the language of daily life.

With regard to the sales of scholarly books in the more limited academic circles which are intended to be the real beneficiaries of such publications, the average is much lower than is ordinarily imagined. The facts may be condensed in a few sentences. Count the number of institutions in this country where advanced and graduate work not only appears in the catalogs, but is actually given in the classroom. Multiply the small number by the baker's dozen of serious students in each of the schools. Add to the result a tenuous sprinkling of College and University libraries which make a practice of purchasing scholarly books for their reference shelves,—and you have a total of perhaps 100 copies sold annually of each of the books to the production of which the publisher has brought his courage and resources and the scholar many weary years, sometimes a lifetime, of devoted labor.

Unless publishers in England and Continental Europe have, in some way, succeeded in outwitting the laws of supply and demand, we are bound to admit that conditions there are vastly different from those in this country. England offers, year after year, increasing facilities to the advanced student of languages and literatures. Anglo-Saxon, Old and Middle English manuals and texts; handbooks in all the old Germanic dialects; editions of old French, Spanish, and Italian works; and primers even of Basque may be found in the catalogs of English publishers. France offers a supply of solid fundamental treatises in Experimental Phonetics and in Pure and Applied Linguistics. No catalog from Germany reaches us without its

abundance of books in *Sprach- und Literaturwissenschaft*, well nigh every one of them the result of valuable research, and all of them the index of some definite demand for books of scholarly character. Yet, in the United States, publications in Linguistic Science may almost be counted on the fingers of one's hands; grammars, handbooks and chrestomathies in the Germanic and Romance Languages,—with such sporadic exceptions as Grandgent's *Introduction to Vulgar Latin* and *Provençal Phonology and Morphology*,—have to be imported from abroad; no scholar has yet come forward with an American edition of the Eddic Poems or the *Poema de mio Cid*; and it is only this year of 1922 which saw the first edition of Dante's *Vita Nuova*, issued by the same publishing house that years ago had the enterprise to place Dante's *Divina Commedia* at the disposal of American scholars and is now undertaking a definitive edition of the old French *Chanson de Roland*. If we regard the still more important field of English Philology, how shall we explain the circumstance that an American edition of the Anglo-Saxon *Beowulf* has had to wait until the Spring of the present year?

If the foregoing remarks seem to imply either the advocacy of a nationalistic conception of scholarship or the insinuation that we have a paucity of scholars competent to produce scholarly works, let me be the first to disclaim any such implication. The former proposition would be not only undesirable but actually impossible; the latter would not correspond with facts as we observe them. If a personal note may be permitted, I like to think that Professor Spingarn's recent arraignment of our Universities as institutions that "seem to have been created for the special purpose of ignoring or destroying the spirit of scholarship," is an underestimation of the value of the results attained by American scholars. We have to-day no scarcity of scholarly authorities in whom we may take pride. What we lack, however, are better facilities for publishing and thus directly encouraging works of research. Not long ago Dean Woodbridge of

Columbia University called attention to the fact that the work of American scholars in the field of History is seriously hampered because of the difficulty of securing publication. Professor Cajori of the University of California is authority for the statement than in Mathematics no new books in advanced fields have been issued in this country in recent years, although several manuscripts are awaiting publication. Apparently, the field of Modern Languages is not the only one in which the present situation is to be deplored. The question naturally arises, "What attitude is taken by the publishing world in the crisis with which scholars are confronted?"

The academic public is prone to believe that the bookman's business is one of strict cash-registry. To a certain extent this is undeniable. As someone has aptly remarked, the publisher is in business to make profits; if he is a publisher for any other purpose, he is not in business. But with this much granted, the publishers of educational books must be set far apart from the generality of the trade. Dealing as they do continually with the means of education, the cause of academic education becomes one of their chief concerns. And in view of the fact that the number of books distributed thru the American schools exceeds all the volumes circulated thru the trade channels, it is proper and desirable that the leaders, at least, among the educational publishers should adopt a professional as well as a business attitude towards the progress of education.

A professionally-minded publisher takes satisfaction in being of definite service to the teaching craft and realizes, besides, that specialized books which, by their very nature, are doomed to be slow sellers, sometimes strengthen his list of more marketable publications. Such books will help to set standards, and in time may create the need for educational texts that will be highly remunerative and may in turn open the way to the issuance of additional scholarly books. But, a preëminent elementary textbook in any science appears but once in a generation, and the publishers'

reserve fund is bound to become depleted beyond the point of safety, unless the academic world, which actually stands in need of specialized tools of instruction, adopts ways and means of earnest coöperation with the publishers. What are some of these means of coöperation?

Walter Scott once said that publishers are the only tradesmen in the world who professedly, and by choice, deal with a pig in a poke. What was true in Scott's day is true in a wider sense to-day when with the enormous increase in the cost of book production, the publisher can secure his margin of profit only in quantity production and large sales,—two considerations that cannot be predicated of the scholarly book. The element of uncertainty might be considerably minimized if expert judgment in regard to the desirability, if not actual need, of certain scholarly publications could be freely collected and crystallized; for, without some buying capacity to rely upon, no publisher in the world, even the most professionally minded, can really be expected to undertake the publication of a book.

Dean Woodbridge's statement that professors find it difficult to secure the publication of important books without providing a large part of the expenses involved, is in all likelihood founded in experience and may hold true of the majority of publishers. It is open to doubt, however, whether this practice would be quite so general in its application if scholars brought with them the guarantee of the cost, not in actual currency but in a careful and unbiassed canvas of the field of demand that would encourage the publisher to believe that, from the standpoint of circulation, a given book would not be as dead as a doornail on the very day of its birth. The leaders of the Modern Language Association must have had some such idea in mind when they wisely provided a Committee of Award to select the most deserving manuscripts for the *Monograph Series*. When all is said, let us candidly face the fact that very few if any American publishers can compare in point of resources with the two famous English Presses which enjoy the monopoly of printing

the revised version of the Bible and the Church of England Prayer Book, and thus can generously publish works of most minute scholarship almost regardless of financial loss. Even our highly endowed University Presses, aside from their inevitable harvests of doctoral monographs, are exercising their prerogative of selection and trying to outlive the universal jibe that their function is to publish works which no one is expected to read.

Another matter of importance is the distribution of the books once they are published. Effective distribution is the preëminent problem of book-publishing. Unless the publisher's business is adapted to the selling of scholarly works, unless a given book is, as it were, "geared" to his selling organization, no amount of goodwill will suffice to bring the book before the man in a thousand who really wants it. But, let us assume that conditions are ideal: the right manuscript makes its appearance; the publisher accepts it; his organization is capable of distributing the output; teachers are interested in the book. At the very outset of his campaign the publisher meets with an embarrassing obstacle. This obstacle consists in the fact that American College and University professors expect all educational publishing houses to send them free copies of every book they bring out. A moment's reflection is sufficient to convince one that, on the one hand, a publishing house that handles primarily textbooks cannot afford to offend the teachers who are, after all, their only patrons; and, on the other hand, the bottom is knocked out from under a book, as a marketable proposition, if free copies are supplied to the teachers who are the only possible clients. When a publisher has prepared a series of scholarly books, like the well-known *Belles-Lettres Series* in English literature, at a cost of no less than \$60,000, he really must be pardoned for desiring to see his labors, at least in some measure, rewarded.

One is reminded at this point of the fact that half a century ago the highest type of College graduate often chose an academic career at the expense of severe sacrifices, whereas

the best men to-day are reluctant to turn toward a scholarly career. There is need evidently of raising the relatively low standing of scholarship in the eyes of the undergraduates. There is also need, perhaps on the part of all of us, of continuous self-improvement if we are to escape intellectual atrophy and are to inspire a love of learning and scholarship for its own sake. But, if the teacher is to rise above the crude notion that the teaching of his subject begins and ends with the Elementary French, Spanish or German grammar and a repeated reading of the same ten or twelve literary texts, he needs to create an atmosphere that is favorable to intellectual expansion. He needs to encourage acquaintance with books, he needs to encourage the purchase of books by his advanced students and the library of the institution with which he is connected. He should encourage the purchase of books as a professional obligation to himself and his craft in the same way that progressive men of other professions instinctively surround themselves with the best and latest publications in their respective fields.

Unless the practice of complimentary copies in the case of books of scholarly character is restricted and publishers are not left to feel that, in issuing such books, they are merely benefiting the printer, binder, and the paper manufacturer, little hope can be seen for the betterment of the present situation. Scholars will be obliged to continue awaiting the convenience of University Presses and of privately endowed societies, which lack effective means to distribute their works, whereas under favorable circumstances educational publishers would not be reluctant to publish from time to time a reasonable number of scholarly books. In England, we are told, four times the number of scholarly books are sold in proportion to the population as in the United States. In Continental Europe the ordinary publisher does not hesitate to bring out, usually in unbound form, a book of pure scholarship, if it is worth bringing out, because he never gives away copies and expects, from a knowledge of his available market, to be able to sell enough copies to meet

the expenses. But in the United States, under conditions prevailing to-day, one finds at most two or three educational publishers who bring out books of scholarly character, and of them it must be said that they show a high degree of courage and a sincere desire to be of service to scholars.

The situation then, in this country, with respect to the scholarly book is far from being satisfactory. It falls below the degree of progress made in England and in Continental Europe. It robs serious investigation of one of its greatest incentives, namely publication. It is a credit neither to scholars nor to publishers. Yet it is not without its possibilities of relief. The Modern Language Association has established its *Monograph Series*; other agencies, such as University Presses, contribute their quota of assistance. As regards publishing houses, most of which have thus far been more commercial than professional, an approach, at least, to the remedy might be made if scholars offered them manuscripts born of careful judgment and wise selection, and if the present attitude toward the purchase of scholarly works underwent a thorough-going change. Perhaps the Modern Language Association could go on record as favoring the publication of scholarly books, and officially recommend that all the teachers who are interested in such books should offer to pay for their purchase. It would help still more effectively if the Association could, in instances that are particularly worthy of such action, raise a subscription fund to defray a part of the manufacturing cost of such publications.

This entire problem is one that can, evidently, be solved only by schoolmen and bookmen acting in conjunction with each other toward a common goal. If, in the course of the present discussion, from the standpoint of a bookman whose sympathies lie unreservedly on the side of research, the tendency has been to place a greater responsibility on the academic world than is usually the case, let me be permitted to hark back to the wisdom of Francis Bacon:—"I hold every man a debtor to his profession, from the which, as men of

course do seek to receive countenance and profit, so ought they of duty to endeavor themselves, by way of amends, to be a help and ornament thereunto."

ALEXANDER GREEN